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ABSTRACT

The development of six Project Information Packages (PIPs) was supported by the U.S. Office of Education (USOE) in 1973. The PIPs were designed to provide "how to" information and instructions to facilitate the implementation of the selected compensatory reading and mathematics projects in school districts with a minimum amount of technical assistance. In fiscal year 1975, grants were awarded to 19 school sites for the purpose of implementing one of the exemplary projects. This document is a summary of the findings from the first year of a two-year study evaluating the success of the packaged projects as a way of improving reading and mathematics skills of disadvantaged children. The complete text of the first-year study is contained in the related documents cited above. (Author/MLF)

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EVALUATION OF THE FIELD TEST OF PROJECT INFORMATION PACKAGES (PIPs)

February 1976

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation of the Field Test of Project Information Packages (PIPs)

Purpose of the Study

In its continuing search for successful means by which to disseminate exemplary education projects, the U.S. Office of Education in 1973 supported the development of six Project Information Packages (PIPs). The PIPs were designed to provide "how to" information and instructions to facilitate the implementation of the selected compensatory reading and mathematics projects in new school districts with a minimum amount of technical assistance. The projects selected for packaging passed stringent criteria of effectiveness with respect to reading and mathematics skills in addition to review by the Education Division's Joint Dissemination Review Panel. Five of the six projects, originally developed by local education agencies with ESEA, Title I funds, are "pull out" projects. These projects serve a special target group of students and therefore supplement rather than replace the regular classroom teaching. Consequently, the projects require students to leave class and go to another location to participate. The sixth project, originally developed by a local education agency with other federal funds, is not a "pull out" type of project but instead serves all children in the specified grade and therefore requires regular classroom teachers to make changes in their methods or behavior.

The central principle assumed in developing the PIPs was that if the antecedent conditions of the effective instructional project could be established in a new site (the Replication Principle), then the project would be reproduced and would again prove effective in terms of student achievement gains. In addition to this principle two other assumptions were made. First, it was assumed that it was necessary to match the setting of the replicating site with the setting of the original, successful site. This was to be accomplished by providing information to potential project adopter sites about the original settings in the form of an Analysis and Selection Kit (ASK). Districts interested in replicating a packaged project would use the ASK and self select an appropriate project that matched local conditions. Second, it was assumed that project management was the key to replicating the original conditions. Given this assumption, the PIPs highlighted the importance of a dynamic, experienced project director who has responsibility for establishing the antecedent conditions for effective instruction. Information provided in the PIPs was management oriented to help project directors and teachers set up the

conditions for the instructional program to be recreated; the packages specified requirements for space, qualified staff, materials and equipment, students selection, scheduling, record keeping and the like. The PIPs did not describe in detail the teaching/learning episode, classroom interactions, or sequences of events within the instructional program nor did they describe the appropriate uses of each of the recommended curriculum materials, since it was assumed that these events would follow given the appropriate mix of resources and the required teaching staff of highly qualified, well trained compensatory reading or mathematics specialists.

In fiscal year 1975, PIPs were tried out in a number of sites across the country. Under section 306 of ESEA, Title III, grants were awarded to 19 school sites for the purpose of implementing one of the exemplary projects via a PIP. To assess the viability of disseminating successful projects via packages as a way of improving reading and mathematics skills of disadvantaged children, a contract was awarded to Stanford Research Institute in June 1974. The two year study was to examine the implementation of the packaged projects in the try out sites and focus on the following questions:

1. Are local education agencies motivated to adopt a packaged project?

2. Can exemplary projects be implemented in new sites via the PIPs? Where implementation problems are due to faults in the packages, can reasonable modifications be recommended?

3. For what functions and in what amount is technical assistance required? If a considerable amount of technical assistance is required, can the packages be made more autonomous?

4. Are the projects, implemented via the PIPs, effective in improving student achievement?

5. What are the effects of the projects on student attitudes? Are the projects acceptable to the local education agency, to teachers, parents, and the community?

6. What is the cost of implementing the projects?

The first year of the study was to examine the implementation process and determine the fidelity of implementation of the PIP specifications in each of the 19 sites, identify implementation problems encountered by the try out sites and recommend how the packages might be revised in light of the problems identified. Also of concern during the initial year of the study was the determination of the usefulness of the PIPs for guiding project implementation, the soundness of the principles and assumptions upon which the PIPs were developed, and the reaction of project participants and non-participants to the projects. The first year of this study has been completed and the findings are summarized here. The second year of the study will investigate the impact of the projects on student achievement and will explore the participating school districts' intentions for continuing the projects in school year 1976-77 when Title III section 306 money is no longer available for their operation.

The Study Approach

The major evaluation strategy was to compare what was specified in the PIPs, given the assumptions upon which they were developed, with what actually occured at the project sites. In order to investigate the discrepancies between what was expected with actual events, and the sources of those discrepancies several data collection activities were undertaken.

Five visits were made to each of the 19 field test sites throughout the year to observe the project, to interview project and non-project personnel involved in implementation, and to conduct student testing. Observations of the projects during the site visits were used to determine the degree of implementation of the specified instructional program elements and environment. Interviews were conducted with district administrators, principals, teachers and aides to learn about the implementation process, to determine the causes of implementation problems, project deviations and modifications and to determine acceptability of the packaged projects and the like. Informal contacts with parents of children who were participating were also conducted to determine their reaction to the projects.

Although the first year of the evaluation was to focus on project implementation rather than impact on participating students, student pre- and post-measurements, both standardized achievement tests and attitude surveys were administered to a minimal sample of participating students. This was done as a check to make sure that the implementation year was not disruptive in terms of student achievement and attitudes.

Contact report forms were used throughout the year by project staff at the original and try out project sites and by government and evaluation staff to report telephone conversations, visits and other contacts where assistance or clarification was requested, offered or obtained. Finally, Instructional Staff Questionnaires and Administrative Staff Questionnaires were administered to assess staff attitudes toward the PIP and the local project and Resource/Cost Questionnaires were administered to determine the resources and associated cost of project implementations.

Findings and Conclusions

The results of the first year of the study were described in terms of the stages involved in the implementation process and the soundness of the assumptions and principles upon which the PIPs were developed.

During the selection/adoption stage, it was intended that local decision makers would: (1) utilize awareness materials--the Analysis and Selection Kit or the ASK--to determine if one of the packaged projects met local needs, (2) select an appropriate project to implement and (3) apply for the ESEA, Title III, section 306 funds that were made available for PIP implementation. This stage did not proceed as planned, however, for a number of reasons. Most important was the fact that awareness materials were not provided to potential adopters and what happened was that most local education agencies (LEAs) applied "blind" for a grant and a PIP project they knew little or nothing about and agreed to "replicate" projects and cooperate with an evaluator. Packaged projects were assigned to LEAs applying for grants on the basis of information provided in their applications. As a result, there appeared to be much misinformation held about the packages and the exemplary projects by the LEA staffs. This was due in part to the selection/adoption process that actually occurred and in part to the lack of communication between the dissemination agent (USOE) and the participants. In addition, LEAs were not clear about whom to contact when questions arose.

In applying for a PIP, LEA personnel were not motivated by the concept that implementation of a proven project as described in the PIP would lead to similar success. Instead the motivating factor was a need to serve certain grade levels or special groups in the district with good educational programs and seeing the Title III grant as a way to serve those needs. However, because replication was a condition of the grant, the great majority of district staffs were willing to adhere to the instruction in the packages for implementing the projects and were willing to adapt themselves in terms of staffing, scheduling, providing facilities, and the like as specified in the PIPs.

The actual selection/adoption processes that occurred made it clear that the role of a dissemination agent and the lines of communication among participants in the adoption process must be considered, along with the ASK and PIP materials, as necessary parts of a workable dissemination strategy.

During the start-up stage, as specified in the PIPs, the project staff is hired, appropriate space, equipment and materials are obtained, the non-project staff are oriented to the project, and students are selected and scheduled for participation. For the staff at the try out sites these activities were difficult to conduct according to the sequences, time lines and procedural recommendations in the PIPs due to the late and piecemeal arrival of the PIP materials. It was because of the dedicated efforts of the local PIP project directors and staff that the start-up activities, which required several months, were condensed into several weeks, problems were resolved, and the projects became a reality. Thus, by the beginning of the school year or a few weeks thereafter, the main elements of the projects were present.

It was in the areas of preservice training and orientation of non-project staff that the most critical and widespread deviations from PIP specifications occurred. This was partly due to the fact that the packages did not communicate enough about the nature of the instructional program to permit project directors to lead training sessions or orientations with confidence. Consequently, a major recommendation for PIP revision is the addition of more explicit information on training and instruction.

An important finding related to the start-up stage, which resulted in a major recommendation for revision of the PIPs, is that some adaptation of original project activities would always be necessary because no two school sites are exactly alike and neither packages nor any other mechanism can anticipate which aspects cannot be replicated at new sites. For packaging, this means that descriptions of desired outcomes of each stage and the rationale for the outcomes should be described clearly but appropriate steps and activities to attain these outcomes be included as suggestions rather than specifications. New districts could then decide the consequences of any adaptations or changes required. The recommendations for PIP revisions are based on this notion.

In every site, with one possible exception, local staffs using just the descriptions and instructions of the PIP created the projects that were explicitly described in the PIPs, in spite of the difficulties encountered by the LEA personnel in attempting to implement the PIP specifications for the start-up stage. Moreover, across sites, classrooms with the same type of PIP project were very much alike. Thus, under the conditions of the field test, every project was implemented in the new sites and, with one or two

exceptions there was considerable fidelity to the specifications in the PIP.

Although student achievement gain is a major issue for investigation during the second year of the study, a preliminary assessment of achievement outcomes was conducted on a sample of project students during the initial year. For the sample of students tested, differences in achievement outcomes relative to the norm group on the Metropolitan Achievement Test were not "educationally significant" in terms of a specified criterion (one-third standard deviation beyond an equal percentile growth expectation) during the first try out year. On the other hand, students were happy with the projects they were participating in and did not feel any stigma attached to participation. Staff members at the try out sites reported improvement in academic skills, motivation (self-confidence, motivation to learn, attendence), and behavior (relationships with staff and other students inside and outside the classroom) on the part of participating children. In addition, the majority of administrative and teaching staffs at the try out sites felt the projects were successful.

PIP project staff became enthusiastically involved in the implementation of the projects on the basis of the packages and were generally pleased with their accomplishments. They reported that project participation increased their professional competence and stated that they would recommend the PIP to colleagues. Parents interviewed were generally favorably disposed toward the projects and non-project instructional staffs in the schools where PIPs were implemented were also supportive of the projects.

In developing the PIPs the principle of matching the settings or conditions of replicating sites to those of the originating site was considered important. For each PIP in the field test some aspects of original settings were determined to be necessary to project success but they are few in number and to some extent specific to the individual projects. While the field test has provided clues for the six packaged projects, the problem of identifying which features of the original site are significant and important to match is difficult. However, on the basis of the field test several features were judged important. The establishment of the project director's automony and authority is necessary and seemed to be dependent upon the project director's previous role in the district, the size of the district, and the flexibility of the district structure. While these factors appeared to determine the project director's autonomy and authority, complete matching of sites--in terms of geography, size, socio-economic or ethnic characteristics--does not appear necessary. Certain attitudinal characteristics of adopters and their educational philosophies seem more important than the physical location or organizational hierarchy of the LEA. The total project described in

the package should appeal to the people who will be involved in implementing it and the management strategy should suit the adopter LEA and the potential project director.

The management orientation of the PIPs was found to be their best and most successful feature. While the existing PIPs need much revision,the principle of a management package for project installation is sound. In the field-test sites, the PIPs enabled the project directors to get the projects into operation in a few weeks. While the management approach was found to be most efficient for project installation, a strict management orientation at the instructional program level did not provide enough information about the teaching processes or the details of the instructional program. Recommendations for revisions were made accordingly. Although more detailed information in this area is recommended for PIP revision, it is clear that good project directors and teachers must be selected for the project; use of the PIP alone cannot make a mediocre staff into a good one.

Regarding the question of how much autonomy, i.e. the degree to which the personalized "how to" assistance is not required, packages can achieve depends on the intended strategy for disseminating the packages and the degree to which adaptations of the projects occur. A very small amount of "how to" assistance was required in the field test projects. There were few contacts with the original sites for purposes of understanding how to implement the procedures that were specified. These contacts were made primarily by telephone when a specific set of questions arose and served the purposes of building confidence and assuring new staff that correct procedures were being employed. This is not to say that in any future use of PIPs, district staff will not seek or use assistance. One must consider that the current implementation was done under a grant agreement with the government. Therefore, implementing the particular project as specified in the PIP--without outside assistance if possible--was a condition the district staff accepted under the grant agreement. However, under another set of circumstances the staff in implementing school districts would likely contact a previous user of the project and visit to see the project in operation.

Reliance on the Replication Principle in developing the PIPs had consequences for the way in which the field test was administered. Projects were monitored for their adherence to the PIP specifications and constrained against "deviations" and "modifications". While it is clear that fidelity to PIP specifications can be very good (as it was in several try out sites) the results have shown that exact replication or perfect fidelity is not possible. Some at least minor adaptations are necessary since no two sites or individuals are exactly alike.

In summary the study found that:

1. Using just the descriptions and instructions provided in the packaged projects local project staffs implemented the projects with considerable fidelity to the specifications in the packages.

2. Local project staffs were enthusiastically involved in the implementation of the projects and the projects were a source of considerable pride.

3. The parents and non-project school personnel in the try out sites were supportive of the projects.

4. Few features of the original project site seemed important to match in sites implementing the projects. Those that were important are:

   1. establishment of the local project director's autonomy and authority.

   2. commitment to the project on the part of the people involved in implementing it.

   3. statisfaction with the management approach of the project by the adopter district.

5. The PIPs were relatively autonomous in terms of the amount of additional "how to" assistance required by the try out sites, but staff at the try out sites desired personal contact with other persons who had used the projects.

6. While most try out sites implemented the projects with considerable fidelity to PIP specifications, some minor adaptations were and are likely always to be necessary since no two sites are exactly alike.

7. While generally try out sites reported that their projects were successful and indicated improvement on the part of students in academic skills, self confidence, motivation to learn, attendance and behavior, and students reported that they enjoyed participating, test scores for this first year were not "educationally significant" according to the criterion employed.